



EDA Update



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Economic Developers and the World of Social Media

Social media—in the form of tools such as LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube and blogs—are starting to transform how we live our lives. When it comes to the world of economic development, social media usage is growing, but not yet as a consistent part of the practitioner's tool kit.

A recent survey sponsored by the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) and Development Counsellors International (DCI) took a deeper look at the state of social media among economic developers. The survey asked more than 300 IEDC members about their use of social media and its role in their organizational strategies and communications efforts.

The survey results clearly indicate that social media is still a “new thing” for economic developers. While 57 percent of respondents use social media in their organization's communications efforts, most of this use has only begun in the past year. In fact, of those using social media, only 37 percent of respondents have used social media for longer than one year. As DCI President and Chief Creative Officer Andy Levine noted, “Economic development groups are just getting their feet wet with social media. We're in the very early days of this work.”

While many groups are diving into the world of social media, some economic developers remain skeptical. Twenty-five percent of respondents reported that they don't use social media because they question its effectiveness in meeting their organization's goals. DCI's Levine sees this pattern as more of a generational divide as opposed to a trend that is unique to economic development. He notes that, as in other fields, young economic developers “get it” and are very engaged in the use of new social media tools. As social media tools gain greater use, these doubts will likely disappear.

The survey found that of those using social media, most groups are using it in a “broadcast mode,” i.e. to share organization news, promote new and existing programs, or to publicize events. And, most of these communications are to people within the organization's region or community. Wider outreach to external audiences is more limited. According to Levine, this approach is akin to using social media as just another kind of electronic newsletter. In his view, “Organizations that just broadcast program information are not providing material that is very scintillating to the end user. To use social media well, organizations need to embrace interactive models that encourage response, dialogue and conversation.”

Survey findings also revealed that LinkedIn and Facebook are by far the most commonly used tools. But, few organizations are using other tools such as podcasts or online videos or even blogs. In particular, LinkedIn is viewed as an important business networking tool. Facebook appears to have more use for personal networking.

The survey results suggest that social media is going to be a core part of future communication programs for economic developers, and this shift will require a new mindset. As Levine notes, “Social media requires a quick response, and moving quickly means some loss of control. Some economic developers are uncomfortable with this shift.” He expects that social media will play an especially important role in crisis response. To date, no economic development group has faced a major public relations crisis akin to that facing corporations such as JetBlue's flight

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EDA is now accepting applications for Global Climate Change Mitigation Incentive Fund assistance

EDA's Global Climate Change Mitigation Incentive Fund (GCCMIF) was established to strengthen the linkages between economic development and environmental quality. The purpose and mission of the GCCMIF is to finance projects that foster economic development by advancing the green economy in distressed communities. The GCCMIF supports projects that create jobs through, and increase private capital investment in, efforts to limit the nation's dependence on fossil fuels, enhance energy efficiency, curb greenhouse gas emissions and protect natural systems. For more detailed information visit the [website](#).

Economic Development Project Evaluation Tool

This [tool](#), created by the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, provides qualitative and quantitative analysis of a project to help economic development practitioners determine its likelihood of success in a given region.

Crossing the Next Regional Frontier

This [tool](#) helps a region guide strategic conversations about where to invest scarce resources to build prosperity (for the next generation). More specifically, this will enable regional leaders to focus on two sets of core assets that create prosperity: brainpower and innovation.

delays in winter 2007 or Wall Street’s financial firms responding to criticisms of exorbitant pay packages. But, if an organization does face a major crisis, social media will have to be part of an effective crisis control effort.

Finally, Levine expects to see a lot of innovations in the use of social media. For example, he envisions that communities could create “digital ambassadors” to discuss the benefits of living and working in a certain region or community. These ambassadors, people who have many Facebook followers or LinkedIn connections, would serve as a very credible advocate for local economic development efforts. He expects to see lots of experimentation and new approaches over the next several years.

For more information:
IEDC: <http://www.iedconline.org>
DCI: <http://www.dc-intl.com>
Survey Link: <http://www.dc-intl.com/Social-Media-Survey.aspx>

They’re Doing What? How Economic Development Organizations Across the Country are using Social Media

There are several Economic Development Organizations (EDOs) across the United States that are actively engaged in Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, blog software and other tools that are designed to promote collaboration and interaction. While these tools aren’t the end all be all to social media, they often serve as a person or organization’s first experience with social media. As such, below are some examples of the tools available to EDOs and how some of the early adopters are using these tools.

Facebook

EDO’s utilize [Facebook](#), a social network utility that helps people communicate and connect online, to build online communities about their region, a specific industry, local or national events, contests or other activities. New Carolina, a public–private partnership working to increase South Carolina’s economic competitiveness through a cluster development strategy, has a Facebook page and sub pages for various uses. In addition to its [main page](#), which posts news, events, articles and other timely content, New Carolina also runs the [New Ideas contest page](#) which focuses on an annual contest to bring new ideas to life that will create high–wage jobs. Members of the New Ideas page can vote on submissions, get information about the contest and discuss submissions and ideas.

LinkedIn

[LinkedIn](#) is an interconnected network of experienced professionals from around the world. Over 50 million members can connect with present and former colleagues as well as join groups and discussion boards around industries, topics and job resources. At New Carolina, members of the various cluster communities have found that LinkedIn has been an invaluable tool to collaborate with industry experts and others in those cluster industries outside of the South Carolina region ([New Carolina LinkedIn Page](#)).

“I believe there is a tremendous opportunity within LinkedIn because many of the users and our clients and CEOs that we want to target are already using LinkedIn,” said Janet Fritz, Director of Marketing and Technology at Metro Denver EDC. “The challenge is getting to them and engaging them to be part of the community. We want to make sure all interested parties have access to our staff and resources and that they contact us for more information or learn more about the region.”

Twitter

[Twitter](#) is a free social networking and micro–blogging service that enables its users to send and read messages known as tweets . Tweets are text–based posts of up to 140 characters displayed on the author’s profile page and delivered to the author’s subscribers (*Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia/twitter*). The EDC of Sarasota County is using Twitter to communicate with business leaders outside of their community touting benefits and quality of life in the community (<http://twitter.com/edcsarasota>). In fact, the EDC of Sarasota’s Community Relations Director, Emily Sperling noted that she experienced an increase in media inquiries based on her tweets as well as interest from people outside of her community that she normally wouldn’t have such regular access to.

At Metro Denver EDC, their Twitter experience started with the Democratic National Convention last year. The EDC hosted a “media spa” and used Twitter to communicate and attract national

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November 16–22, 2009
Global Entrepreneurship Week [\[Website\]](#)

January 31–February 2, 2010
IEDC 2010 Leadership Summit, The Woodlands, Texas [\[Website\]](#)

February 21–23, 2010
NARC’s 2010 Nation Conference of Regions, Washington , DC [\[Website\]](#)

March 1–3, 2010
NADO’s 2010 Washington Policy Conference, Washington , DC [\[Website\]](#)

April 10–13, 2010
APA’s National Conference, New Orleans , LA [\[Website\]](#)

and international media to their briefings. Currently, they utilize Twitter to post news and events, research and draw traffic to their Web site or to recent blog posts (<http://twitter.com/MetroDenverEDC>).

Flickr and YouTube

[Flickr](#), an online photo management and sharing application, and [YouTube](#), the largest online video community, provides EDOs with the opportunity to broadcast and host their visual assets. Photographs and videos have long–been effective in telling a story and showcasing the many benefits of a community or simply visually displaying an already compelling message. [Metro Denver's photo stream](#) on Flickr showcases photographs from press conferences, events and activities across the region. EDC of Sarasota, New Carolina and many others are all utilizing YouTube for hosting videos.

A Comprehensive Approach

[Indy Partnership](#), regional EDO working to attract jobs and investment to the 10–county Indianapolis Region located in Central Indiana has embarked on a holistic Web 2.0 approach and is using all of the mediums mentioned above plus some. The Indy Partnership Web platform hosts [dynamic content](#) such as video, photographs and [blogs](#), links to twitter as well as email marketing capabilities, mapping and data–based applications (using GIS and other data) and advertising tools.

Joshua Hall, Indy Partnership's Director of Marketing touts one of their primary benefits from this approach. "Indy Partnership is utilizing social media as an organic form of search engine optimization. The logarithms operating Google and Bing and other major search engines are hunting for new content from trusted sources, and we know that Indy Partnership and the Indianapolis Region are likely to be returned in the top results for many keyword phrases because we're doing our best to consistently publish relevant content in those categories."

Content is still King

Developing content that is relevant, timely and engaging to audiences is the primary effort of social media. " Social media is people–intensive not budget–intensive. There's relatively low to no cost to adopt these strategies but it does take staff time to keep it up to date," said Fritz. "The goal is to balance it as part of an overall marketing campaign."

In fact, all of those interviewed emphasized that developing content that is relevant and has a personality is one of the most crucial elements to being successful with social media. "Content and bandwidth are the challenges. The goal is to do something new with social media every day," said Hall. "There is no substitute for thoughtful content generated by subject matter experts."

So how does an organization address these content demands? Hall and the others emphasized that getting the entire organization involved with social media is important. Fritz adds that having a plan for content generation and integration of these tools is crucial to success. Amy Love, New Carolina's Deputy Executive Director notes the importance of timely content, "You become relevant when you consistently have something interesting to say. Keep messages simple and infuse personality into it."

For more information:

New Carolina: <http://www.newcarolina.com>

Metro Denver EDC: <http://www.metrodenver.org/>

EDC of Sarasota County: <http://www.edcsarasotacounty.com/>

Indy Partnership: <http://www.indypartnership.com/>

Social Media: Where do I start?

While the usage of social media tools has started to increase among economic development practitioners in the last year, many in the industry are still uncertain as to how to utilize these tools and where to start.

Essential to the success of social media is the need for organizations to recognize that these Web 2.0 tools (Web applications which facilitate interactive information and collaboration) should be one element in a larger, more strategic communications plan. Utilizing social media doesn't eliminate the need for more traditional communications activities; however it does expand an organization's ability to reach new and existing audiences.

Organizations looking to embark on social media should also follow a few best practices that will greatly improve their success:

- Identify the goal and mission. This will aid in selecting the type of social media tool utilized;
- Address plans and policies around social media use—from content generation to who in the organization is responsible for the online community; and
- Define success and develop metrics that can be used to qualify and quantify social media activities.

Organizations will better be able to manage the vast array of tools if they have clear goals in mind for their social media activities. Some economic development organizations are utilizing Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr and other tools to simply connect with new audiences in their regions and communities. Others are using these tools to attract businesses and interest from outside their community or to further enhance tourism promotion. Economic Development Organizations (EDOs) are also using these tools to engage their stakeholders through discussion boards on LinkedIn; contests run through Facebook and events that can be followed through Twitter and Facebook, just to name a few.

The diversity of social media tools available to EDOs presents both a challenge and opportunity. While clearly identifying the goals is the first step, another crucial step is recognizing the internal commitment necessary to successfully launch a social media campaign.

To ease some of this burden, organizations should consider adopting a social media policy that addresses key questions that may arise during outreach. Social media policies provide guidelines for members of the organization as well as members of the online community. It should state the purpose of the social media, identify ownership/rules about content posts as well as clarify rules of behavior for online members. An organization should have a clear plan for who will manage the tool and how comments, questions, changes or issues should be handled.

As with any communications strategy, EDOs must also plan to evaluate the effectiveness of tools and develop metrics for success. Metrics for social media can often be hard to define but organizations may consider a wide-range of metrics from the number of members joining and participating in the community (posting, commenting, etc.) to other, sometimes less tangible metrics such as analyzing the demographics of their online audience. Other organizations have discovered that social media's true benefit is the ability to engage audiences and get real-time feedback from members of their community. Another benefit that some have identified is a noticeable increase in media inquiries from reporters following them on Facebook or Twitter.

The very nature of social media provides economic developers an opportunity to organize and engage businesses and residents throughout their region. While social media may seem daunting at first, those organizations who are embracing Web 2.0 and social media have come to have a better understanding of their communities and stakeholders and are empowered by the feedback and involvement that their online communities provide.

For more information on social marketing and Web 2.0 tools visit:

<http://www.mashable.com>

<http://www.govloop.com>

http://www.usa.gov/webcontent/technology/other_tech.shtml

<http://www.socialmediatoday.com>



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